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SOUTH VIET NAM'S OTHER WAR

(Nonmilitary personnel)

Priority area

GOVERNMENT Total: 22,838

Political Action (PATs), Census,
and other

U.S. AID Total: 179

(Agency for International Development)

Prov. advisers and staff 106

Education 11

Agriculture 4

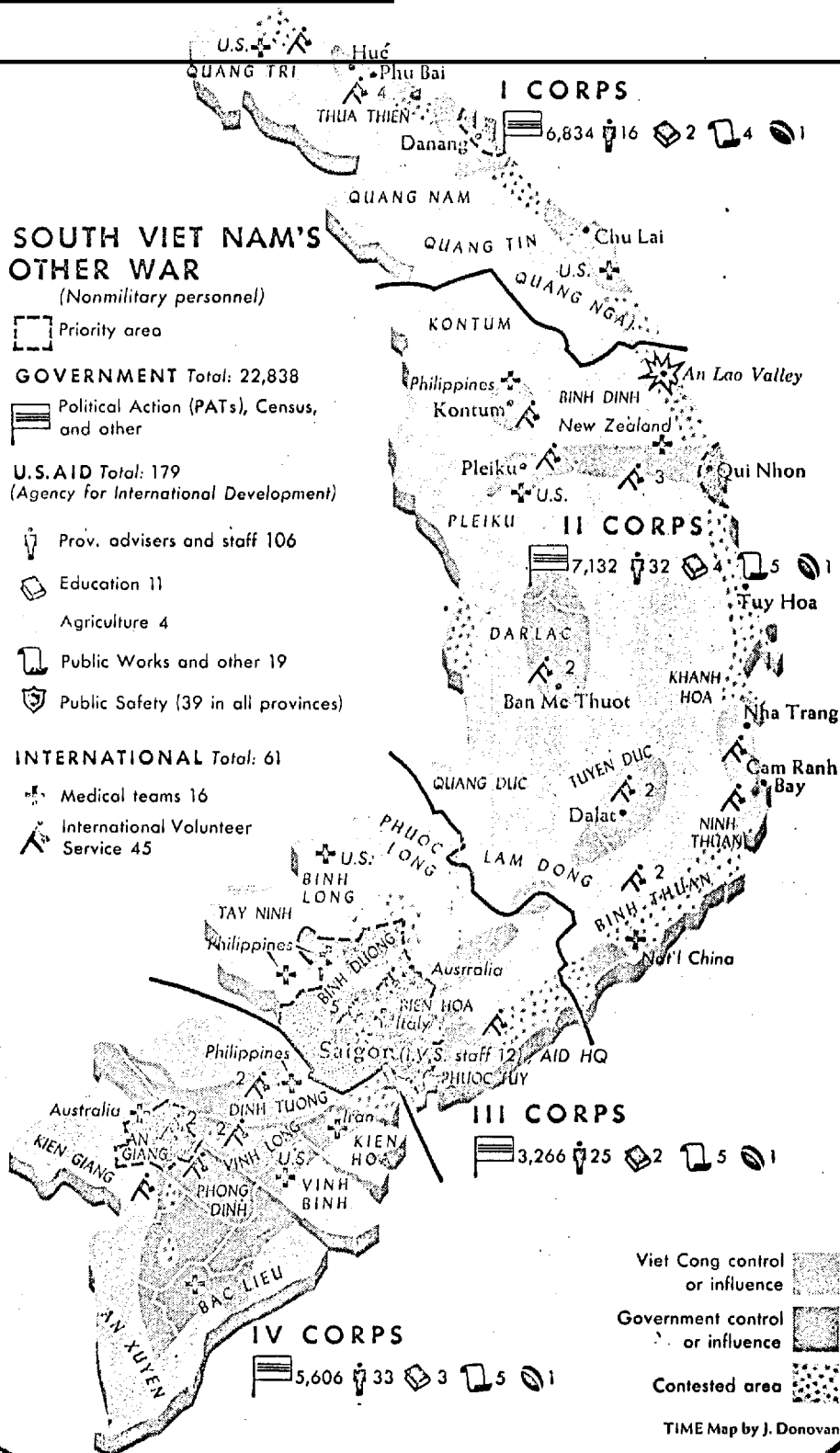
Public Works and other 19

Public Safety (39 in all provinces)

INTERNATIONAL Total: 61

Medical teams 16

International Volunteer
Service 45



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THE WAR IN VIETNAM

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The Second Front

When he flew into Saigon last week Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey carried with him a whole bundle of inspirational proposals freshly minted in the Declaration of Honolulu (page 24). At the direction of President Johnson, Humphrey was charged with the task of publicly launching a U.S.-backed program of social, economic and political reforms at the rice-roots level throughout South Vietnam. Characteristically, he took to his task with over-flowing enthusiasm. On a visit to an experimental animal-husbandry station established with American aid money, he spotted a brand-new pigpen full of Berkshire Blacks, cleared his throat and let out a Minnesota hog call. "Hooeee, hooeee," bellowed the Vice President of the United States. "That's the best call for a hog there is," he added. "Hooeee is a universal language." Then, in a more serious vein, he told NEWSWEEK's William Tuohy: "There's a social revolution taking place here. I'm really impressed with what they are doing."

To old Vietnam hands, however, Humphrey's assumption that an officially sponsored social revolution was already under way in South Vietnam seemed arguable at best. And any implication that the Vice President's much-heralded mission represented some kind of breakthrough in military-political strategy in Vietnam seemed slightly meretricious. Indeed, one of the great clichés of the Vietnamese war is that it is more a political than a military conflict. And everyone from South Vietnam's Premier Nguyen Cao Ky to U.S. lieutenants out in the boon docks has long paid at least lip service to the need to "win the hearts and minds of the people."

Diverse Interests: This need stems from a variety of factors. For one thing, South Vietnam is not really a nation in the modern sense of the word, but rather a conglomeration of 15 million people of diverse ethnic, religious and economic interests. For another, the country's peasants, who comprise 80 per cent of the population, have never been given any reason to feel a sense of loyalty to the Saigon government. Though most of South Vietnam's political leaders are staunchly anti-Communist, it is often for the wrong reason—to perpetuate the closed social system from which they derive their wealth and influence. This, of course, scarcely commends the fight against Communism to the peasantry—especially in view of the fact that since the end of World War II the Communists have shrewdly fed on the widespread rural discontent by promising a sweeping social revolution.

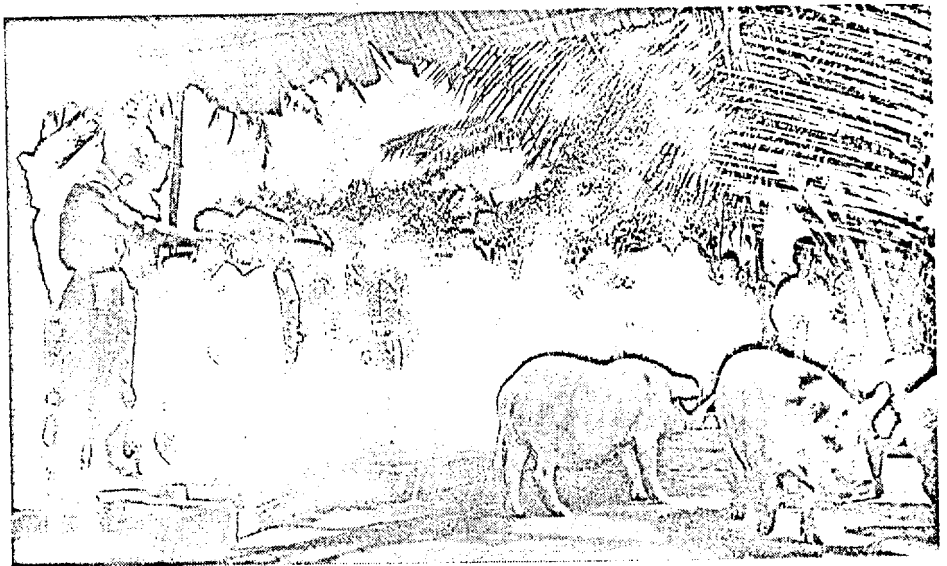
To counter the Communist challenge, successive rulers of South Vietnam have

come up with a variety of reform measures. Before they were finally expelled from Indochina in 1954, the French, using U.S. aid funds, launched some sanitation projects—but these were designed mainly to improve the lot of French settlers. Subsequently, the late President Ngo Dinh Diem set about erecting a string of so-called *agrovilles*—self-sufficient agricultural towns created by merging a number of scattered villages into larger and presumably more viable economic units.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the early efforts was the "strategic hamlet" program, a more sophisticated variant on the *agroville* scheme started by Diem in 1962. This aimed at isolating the Viet

The "new" program publicized at the Honolulu meeting was fashioned by Edward G. Lansdale, a retired Air Force major general and former CIA officer, who is now Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge's chief adviser on pacification. Dubbed "rural construction," the plan is designed to erode the Viet Cong's control of the countryside and replace it with a political base upon which a strong national government, responsive to the people, can be built.

Tactics: To accomplish this ambitious goal, the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments have borrowed a page from Communist tactics. Over the past two years, Saigon has trained a pool of 15,000 politically motivated "rural con-



Vietnamese peasants tour pig breeding farm: 'A universal language'

Cong from their source of peasant support by first relocating entire villages behind the wooden walls of fortified stockades, then organizing their occupants into local defense forces. Though more than 5,000 hamlets were built, the program was a failure because it was pursued in a haphazard fashion. In most cases, no attempt was made at identifying and eliminating Viet Cong agents and their supporters, and as a result none of the hamlets was ever secure. After the fall of Diem, the program collapsed and has never been resumed.

Aid Program: Since then, however, the U.S. has experimented with a whole series of programs under different names—"civic action," "nation-building," "pacification." American civic-action teams, for instance, have traveled from village to village, handing out schoolbooks, building wells and dispensing medicine. And under one U.S. aid program three years ago, \$2 million was spent to distribute pigs to some 5,000 South Vietnamese families as a source of rural farm income which, however, quickly went up in smoke for free family feasts.

struction cadres." At the expense of the CIA, these men are paid about \$25 a month plus a family allowance, and are given a basic ten-week course in military tactics and political action at training centers in Vung Tau and Pleiku. By the end of this year, the South Vietnamese Government hopes to have 30,000 men trained and ready to go to work in their home provinces.

There, they will be assigned by their province chiefs to more than 2,000 hamlets—some of which are supposedly already "pacified." Operating in 59-man groups, the cadres' first task will be to try to establish a working relationship with the hamlet's existing government. Next, Political Action Teams will begin organizing the hamlet's defenses by building fortifications, trenches and warning systems. While this is going on, Civil Affairs cadres will organize groups of four to ten families into "interfamily" units, and New Life Development Teams will survey the need for repairs to houses and roads, arranging loans to finance the work.

The key to the success or failure of

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the rural construction effort, however, will be the so-called Census Grievance Team. After surveying a hamlet and plotting each house on a map, this team will begin its real work of "population control." Every ten days, each adult member of the hamlet will be interrogated in a private booth by a member of the team. He will be asked such questions as which government officials he likes and dislikes, what evidence he has of corruption on the part of officials, what changes he would like to see made. More important, he will be systematically quizzed about the Viet Cong—how often they visit the hamlet, who cooperates with them, when they plan their next attack.

Cooperative: The hope is that once the peasants see that something is actually being done about their grievances, they will become increasingly cooperative in exposing Viet Cong agents and their sympathizers. Pro-Viet Cong villagers will be offered the chance to renounce their ties or act as double agents. If they refuse to cooperate, they can, in the last resort, be denounced to the Viet Cong as government agents or otherwise "eliminated."

As carefully as all this has been thought out, there is, of course, no guarantee that it will work. True, the census grievance approach has been tried with notable success in Kien Hoa Province, south of Saigon, and the former chief of that province, Col. Tran Ngoc Chau, has been put in charge of all rural construction cadres. Beyond that, Saigon has allocated no less than 10 per cent of its

budget to the Ministry of Rural Construction under Gen. Nguyen Duc Thang. And at Honolulu, President Johnson placed his personal prestige—and some \$500 million this year alone—on the success of the program.

Nevertheless, some Americans in Vietnam remain skeptical. To begin with, they doubt that pacification can be made to work except in areas where U.S. or Vietnamese Government troops have unchallenged military control. And even in such areas, it is not always possible to assure the safety of those who cooperate with the government; in one group of villages near Da Nang, a small Viet Cong assassination squad managed to keep local officials intimidated long after the marines held ostensible control of the area. Moreover, even under the relentless urging of Lyndon Johnson, United States and Vietnamese officials will have trouble staying focused on reform measures when, out of necessity, they must give priority to military matters. It was by no means an expression of undue pessimism when one knowledgeable American in Saigon last week remarked: "At this point, I don't give the program more than a 50-50 chance for success."

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the following appraisal of the disappointing results of the second phase of Operation Masher—which was christened Operation White Wing:

After skirmishing with rear-guard Viet Cong squads in the coastal plains around Bong Son, the First Cavalry Division had high hopes of catching the guerrillas' main force in the lush green An Lao Valley, 15 miles to the north. As early as Jan. 26, five Special Forces teams of five men each had been dropped into the valley to find and "fix" the enemy. Immediately, these teams came under enemy fire and radioed back that they had found at least a battalion—and possibly an entire regiment—of Viet Cong.

Rabbits and Elephants

One of two U.S. correspondents to witness the launching of Operation Masher three weeks ago in the coastal rice delta of South Vietnam was NEWSWEEK Senior Editor Arnaud de Borchgrave. Last week, de Borchgrave cabled

Though the Special Forces men knew they were on a "suicide mission," they had been led to believe that there would be a quick follow-through by the First Cav. Instead, the First Cav allowed itself to be diverted by the Viet Cong's rear-guard action outside Bong Son. Then, bad weather set in, hampering mobility. By the time the First Cav finally descended into the valley, nine days had passed, fully half of the Special Forces troops had been wiped out—and the enemy had disappeared.

At Special Forces headquarters in Nha Trang, 200 miles northeast of Saigon, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, last week personally debriefed the survivors of the An Lao Valley. "Those boys were real bitter, and they didn't pull any punches with the boss," reported one U.S. officer. "They expected heavy casualties, but after finding and fixing the enemy and fighting like lions for several days, the least they expected was that their sacrifice would be exploited. Next time, we'll make damn sure we have our own back-up force"—by which he meant one that would respond directly to Special Forces orders.

Cloud: Part of the problem was that the much-vaunted mobility of the First Cav wasn't all it was cracked up to be. For one thing, the First Cav's helicopters can be reduced to semi-paralysis by a low cloud ceiling in a mountainous area. For another, the division's hundreds of choppers require a staggering amount of logistical support. Capt. Joseph L. Spencer, the man responsible for supplying Operation Masher/White Wing, rattled off some of the major items he had to furnish daily: an average of 1,000 air-to-ground rockets, 3,300 rounds of artillery, 40,000 gallons of jet fuel.

Somewhat disheartened by the performance of his unit, one First Cav colonel conceded: "We're like elephants chasing rabbits." What he didn't say, however, was that the U.S.'s rabbits—the Special Forces teams—found the enemy rabbits, but that the elephants were unable to follow through.



The First Cavalry Division moves in: 'The boys were bitter'